

Key Messages

Selecting 'Good' Foster Carers Which Tools Are Effective?

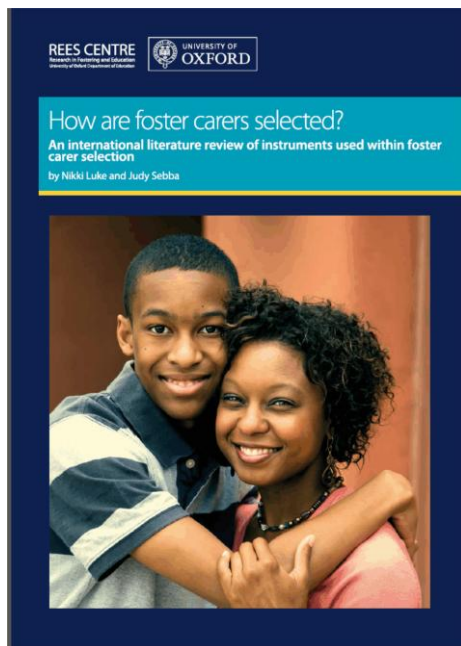
These key messages are based on an international literature review published in September 2013 by the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education at the University of Oxford. We looked to see what research has been carried out about the tools used in foster care selection, what we can learn from this existing research and where more research may be needed.

What is the issue?

Fostering providers use selection tools, such as 'Form F' and the 'Casey Foster Family Assessments', alongside other measures, as part of the assessment of potential new foster carers. These types of tools aim to identify particular personal characteristics and circumstances in order to help select the most suitable people to become carers. We wanted to understand exactly which tools are being used by providers and what evidence exists to show that using these tools leads to more successful foster placements.

Call to Action

- Do not use selection tools as the sole basis for accepting or rejecting foster carer applicants. Use a variety of information sources to cross-check profiles of potential foster carers.
- Use selection tools to help identify strengths of potential foster carers and to highlight areas that may need training and support in future.
- Think carefully about how a selection tool will be used. Design it to reflect the result you are looking for, such as child safety or permanency for the child. How could a foster carer contribute to that specific result? What characteristic(s) might you wish to assess?
- Increase the range of attributes measured by selection tools. For example, consider asking children and young people with foster care experience to identify desirable characteristics in foster carers.
- If using selection tools from other countries, adapt them in line with local cultural values.



How are foster carers selected? An international literature review of instruments used within foster carer selection by Nikki Luke and Judy Sebba.

The full report can be read and downloaded for free:

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/>

For further information about the work of the Rees Centre or to request free hard copies of our reports, please contact the team by email to rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk

Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford OX2 6PY
Tel 01865 274050

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk>

Twitter @ReesCentre

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What did we do?

The Rees Centre looked for research published since 2000 on the topic of tools used in foster carer selection. 25 relevant publications from the UK, North America, Europe and Australasia were chosen for inclusion in this review.

Which specific tools are currently being used to help select and approve 'good' foster carers?
What evidence exists to link any of these tools with successful foster placements?

What did we find out?

There is limited evidence on these tools. Only a small amount of testing has taken place, largely on existing carers rather than new applicants. This could be a problem as we don't know if the attributes of a 'good' carer with lots of experience are being measured, rather than the attributes of someone who has the potential to be a good carer with the right training and support.

These tools may help to improve the selection of foster carers so long as they are not used as the sole basis for accepting or rejecting applicants.

The ongoing relationship between applicant and provider is important in developing and strengthening skills and competencies in fostering. The role of selection tools in this long term process should be explained to the applicant.

Interviewers without appropriate training may introduce bias. This can influence applicants' responses so providers get an inaccurate picture of their characteristics and capabilities.

Selection tools designed for use in other countries may include a cultural bias so are unsuitable for use elsewhere. While some 'desirable' foster carer attributes such as empathy and flexibility are likely to be equally applicable across countries, some cultural values in the tool itself or the wider selection process may cause difficulties.

More work is needed to find out whether an applicant whose profile on a particular selection tool looks 'good' goes on to provide high-quality, stable placements and a supportive environment for the young people they look after.

For those designing selection tools, more use could be made of research evidence on what works well in foster care, as well as young people's views on what they value in a foster carer.